

Oral Statement of
Secretary of Commerce William M. Daley
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries
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As always, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss fish with all of you. I recall one of the first conversations I had with your colleague Senator Lott. The Majority Leader told me that when I think of him, I am to think fish.

Frankly, I think fish when I think of most of you. I do not have to tell this Subcommittee about the value our fishing industry provides to this country. You all represent some of our finest coastal states and fisheries.

I have had the pleasure of being with many of you in your states. I have met fishermen on their home turf: shrimpers on the Gulf, scallopers in New England, and salmon fishermen in Alaska. And I have met with many of them here in Washington.

One of my finest experiences as Secretary of Commerce is becoming familiar with our fishing communities, and appreciating their contributions. Of understanding how the U.S. commercial fish industry generates more than \$25 billion to our economy and employs 300,000 people. We are the fifth largest fishing nation, and our exports are valued at over \$3 billion. It is an important recreational resource for millions of saltwater anglers.

It is my support for this resource -- and the people it supports -- that brings me here.

With me is Penny Dalton, NOAA's Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. She will discuss the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act -- now in its 23rd year. I would like to briefly put this all in context.

It's easy to look at the past decades and see failure. Many important fish stocks are under great pressure. And we don't know enough about the health of even more.

We do know our fishing grounds can be rebuilt to support far more fishing than they do today. Scientists estimate we could increase our catches 60 percent if we manage them better.

At the same time, we must recognize it took 20 years of poor management and good-intentions-gone-wrong to bring us to where we were in 1996, when the Magnuson Act was overhauled into Magnuson-Stevens.

This Administration is committed to the philosophy embodied in the Act. I believe the best way to restore our fisheries and sustain a growing economy is through the combined participation of public, business, and government interests.

We must apply the best science -- including economics and social sciences -- to help fishing communities move from traditional fishing management to newer, sustainable approaches.

I have strongly encouraged NOAA, the Councils, and all the stakeholders to take advantage of the flexibility of Magnuson-Stevens to develop creative solutions and partnerships.

I have learned through my regulatory actions as Commerce Secretary there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each case has its own set of unique circumstances, conflicts and challenges. Resolving these is not easy. These are contentious issues, as you well know. But the fact is, if we fail to come together, we will not have fishermen or fish left. Frankly, I think this is an important test of sustainable development.

Despite the challenges, I see hope in a number of small, recent successes. I think with Magnuson-Stevens we are getting back on track to build sustainable fisheries.

Let me illustrate, if I may, with the progress we are making with scallops in the Northeast. The first directive of Magnuson-Stevens is to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks. In 1994, we were very concerned about groundfish and scallops off of New England. We took the aggressive -- and painful -- step of closing large areas to all fishing.

Then, in late 1998, we learned that after over four years of closure, scallop stocks were recovering. In other words, the closure was working to rebuild scallop stocks and it was time to start rebuilding the scallop fishery.

While Magnuson-Stevens directs us to rebuild fisheries, it also says: use the best science available when we act. Though we knew that scallops were on the way back, our science was not detailed enough to act on it. Also, many raised concerns about starting up scalloping again. Scalloping disturbs the bottom and can have lots of by-catch of groundfish that still needed protection. It looked like yet another contentious issue.

So, the first thing we did was ask for, and listen to, the advice of constituents. Soon we came together around a shared goal -- scallop if possible, while protecting other fish and the habitat.

Then everyone contributed to a solution. We built an extraordinary partnership with industry and the academic community to find out exactly where the scallops were healthy and what areas could be reopened for scalloping. Also, we talked to industry about a management approach that would let scallopers catch scallops if they controlled their by-catch.

For our part, we developed a new way to fund independent observers. And I asked the Council and NOAA to make sure the regulatory process kept moving. Magnuson-Stevens is clear that the Council process is key to making management decisions. But that does not mean we can't find ways to make it flexible and responsive to urgent needs.

I am pleased to say scallopers are fishing within a formerly closed area of Georges Bank nearly nine months earlier than scheduled. In the last six weeks, the fleet has landed more than 2 million pounds of scallops worth nearly \$10 million. They are making money, without compromising long-term sustainability. It is good news for the economy, and good news for the environment.

My point is that the Magnuson-Stevens Act works. It does not need major changes at this time. What we need, is to continue to work collaboratively and creatively.

No question, we want to work with this Committee on addressing outstanding issues, like individual transferable quotas, and observer programs. We feel there is a need to collect more economic data to better understand and manage our fishery resources. Penny will point all of this out in her testimony.

And let me assure the Members of this Committee that I understand when we try new approaches, even though they may be incremental, there are often serious concerns from your constituents back home.

So, I want to work with you, to take into account these concerns as we move forward with developing and implementing the legislation.

Thank you for asking me here, and I ask that my remarks be included for the record.